Skills Investment Strategy

Supporting the Development of a Skilled Workforce in Alberta

POLICY FRAMEWORK
OCTOBER 2003

Alberta
HUMAN RESOURCES AND EMPLOYMENT
the people & workplace department

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Introduction

Alberta has become a national and international leader in economic growth. Innovative, well-trained, skilled, and adaptable Albertans have been the driving force behind the growth. To help maintain the Alberta Advantage and the province's high standard of living, a priority for the Government of Alberta is to ensure that Albertans are prepared for future success.

During 2000 – 2001, Alberta Human Resources and Employment (AHRE) undertook a policy review and assessment of its adult employment and training programs and services. These are programs that help individuals prepare for, train for, find and keep employment. As a result of this review, AHRE began the development of a major policy initiative called the *Skills Investment Strategy*, which will set the direction for AHRE's skills investment programs and services for the next three to five years. The Strategy strengthens AHRE programs and services, making these more responsive to client needs and to the skills requirements of a changing labour market, while ensuring we invest limited financial resources wisely.

AHRE undertook the *Skills Investment Strategy* consultation in June 2002 to obtain feedback on the Strategy from a variety of stakeholders across Alberta. Training providers, employers, clients and AHRE staff were involved in the consultation process. Their input has helped shape the Strategy's policy development, program design and implementation.

The *Skills Investment Strategy* responds to the following labour market trends:

- A tight labour market and continued skill shortages.
- The evolving nature of technologies affecting all workers across all industrial sectors.
- The increasingly complex labour market (e.g. global competition, changing nature of work, changing skills requirements).
- The increasingly diverse Alberta workforce.
- The need for Albertans to continuously upgrade their skills and participate in lifelong learning, as the economy becomes more knowledge based.

The *Skills Investment Strategy* has taken into account the needs of low-income Albertans including: Aboriginal people, immigrants, older workers, persons with disabilities, and youth.

The Strategy supports AHRE's three core businesses:

People Investments: *Providing support for people in need*

Skills Investments: *Helping people to be their best at learning and work*

Workplace Investments: *Supporting workplaces to make Alberta prosperous*

AHRE Vision

Alberta works because we invest in people. The *Skills Investment Strategy* supports AHRE's vision by helping Albertans to be their best in learning and work and by helping them prepare for, train for, find and keep employment.

Goals

The goals of the *Skills Investment Strategy* are to:

- Increase opportunities for Albertans to make successful transitions from school to work, unemployment to employment, and from one career path to another.
- Increase the capacity of Albertans to respond efficiently and effectively to changing skills, knowledge, and abilities required by the economy.
- Reduce the dependency of Albertans on income support programs and increase sustained employment over time.
- Increase the range of assistance and support to employers so that they may prepare for and respond to the changing demand for skills, knowledge, and abilities called for by an expanding economy.
- Enhance the contribution of Albertans for whom full-time employment is not a viable option.

Policy Statement

The *Skills Investment Strategy* sets the direction for AHRE adult training and employment programs. The Strategy provides an array of programs and services that will:

- Better respond to client need
- Better respond to the needs of the labour market
- Ensure accountability among AHRE and key stakeholders

Skills Investment Programs

The *Skills Investment Strategy* simplifies previous skills investment programs. AHRE has consolidated 19 previous programs into four programs with eight program elements. The four skills investment programs are:

1. Career Information
2. Work Foundations
3. Training for Work
4. Workforce Partnerships

Training has been broadened to include:

- Occupational training opportunities for low-income Albertans. These opportunities were previously only available to Employment Insurance (EI) recipients.
- Expanded part-time training opportunities that provide a broader range of programming and increased amount of financial support for those in need. These changes enable low-income Albertans to learn while they earn and increases potential for persons with disabilities to benefit from part-time training.

1. Career Information

To provide programs and services that give Albertans the information and resources they need to make well-informed career, education, employment and business decisions.

Clients

- Albertans who are part of the existing or prospective workforce, employers and service providers.

Program Elements

The *Skills Investment Strategy* continues to build on AHRE's easily accessed labour market and career information products.

Career Development Services
Career Development Services includes career planning, job search and labour market information available to all Albertans through:

- *Career and Employment Assistance Services (CEAS)*
- *Job Order Bank Service*
- *Job Placement Services*
- *AHRE print and electronic resources*

Information is offered:

- in-person at *Labour Market Information Centres* or through the *Careers in Motion* mobile unit
- by telephone through the *Career Information Hotline* at 1-800-661-3753
- on the internet through the Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS) website at www.alis.gov.ab.ca

Youth Connections
Youth Connections helps young people explore career opportunities and helps businesses find employees who are motivated and under the age of 25.

Outcomes

Short Term (within 6 months of program completion)

- Individuals, employers and providers make informed choices about educational, skills training and employment opportunities or investments.

Longer Term

- Increased awareness among clients of labour market trends and the need for lifelong learning.
- Investments by employers and individuals in on-going learning/training.

2. Work Foundations

To provide full-time and part-time basic skills training to enable clients to pursue further job related training and/or to find a job and substantially improve their employment situation.

Clients

- Low-income Albertans who lack the basic academic, language and/or employability skills needed to advance to further training, obtain employment and become self-sufficient.

Program Elements

Basic Skills and Academic Upgrading
Full-time and part-time classroom training for Academic Upgrading (grade 4-12), English-as-a-Second Language Training, and/or general employability skills training. Adult Basic Education at grade 1-3 level is available in special circumstances.

Outcomes

Short Term

- Increased employability.
- Post-program employment that allows clients to have earnings as their primary source of income.
- Progression to further training.

Longer Term

- Sustained employment.
- Reduced dependency on income support.

3. Training for Work

To provide full-time and part-time occupationally-focused training opportunities to enable clients to get a job and substantially improve their employment situation or adapt to changing labour conditions and skill requirements in order to sustain employment.

Clients

- Low-income Albertans who require occupational skills and some basic academic and/or employability skills to obtain employment income and become self-sufficient.
- Low-income Albertans who have basic skills and work experience but require additional training to find/maintain employment and remain self-sufficient.

Program Elements

Job Skills Training
Full-time and part-time occupationally focused training of 12-months or less. Training may be integrated with applied academics and general employability skills. All occupational training programs must teach skills that are in demand by local/regional employers and provide evidence that the graduates of the programs will find work in occupations related to their training without having to undertake further training. Program includes classroom-based and workplace-based training.

- *Integrated Training:* Skill-based training programs for multi-barriered clients that combine academic and general employability skills with job-specific skills.
- *Occupational Training:* Classroom-based training that is occupation-specific and focused on helping clients acquire the job specific skills needed to significantly improve their employment status.
- *Workplace Training:* Worksite training or exposure that focuses on helping clients acquire the employment skills needed to find and maintain employment and increase their income from employment. This type of Job Skills Training has two parts: Work Exposure (designed to help clients develop an awareness of specific occupation and employment opportunities over a period of a few weeks) and Workplace Training (tailor-made and structured worksite-based training opportunities of 6 months or less that teach clients specific skills for occupations that are in demand).

Self-Employment Training
Provides formal instruction in business plan development, business counseling, coaching, guidance and follow-up during business plan implementation.

Disability Related Employment Supports (DRES)
Provides assistance to persons with disabilities in overcoming the barriers to employment created by their disability. DRES is available to support eligible individuals in the Work Foundations, Training for Work, and Career Information programs.

Summer Temporary Employment Program (STEP)
Full-time temporary work-experience placements during the spring/summer months – typically for post-secondary students and high school students.

Outcomes

Short Term

- Increased skills.
- Employment.
- Post-program employment in designated areas of skill shortage or high demand.

Longer Term

- Sustained employment.
- Reduced dependency on income support.

4. Workforce Partnerships

To provide programs and services that ensure working Albertans continue to enhance their skills in order to contribute to Alberta's economic growth or to respond to skills shortages. Workforce partnerships are also intended to identify, develop and implement labour force adjustment and human resource development strategies through industry and community partnerships.

Clients

- Employers, industry associations, municipalities and self-employed individuals.

Program Elements

Labour Market Partnerships (LMP)
The LMP Program is designed to identify, develop and implement projects with organizations, industry sectors and communities with common labour market needs. Projects include activities such as a labour market environmental scan, and development of a strategic plan to address skill shortages and promote workforce effectiveness.

Outcomes

Short Term

- Establishment of labour market partnerships.

Longer Term

- Increase in workplace training.
- Increase in investment made in skill development by employees, employers and the self-employed.

Expected Outcomes

The Strategy proposes a short list of outcome measures directly linked to helping low-income Albertans to improve both their employability and their employment status. While the purposes of the programs and services vary, the key outcomes in almost all instances are expected to include:

- Improved skills
- Improved employment situation for the client
- Increased independence for the client

Setting appropriate performance expectations and measuring these outcomes in a timely, accurate, reliable and affordable manner will be challenging, but these measurements are critical to AHRE's efforts to use meaningful data and evidence-based decision making to adjust programming and to focus on what works. Every effort will be made to appropriately measure these outcomes in non-invasive ways, and clients, providers and the public will be informed of the findings.

Stakeholders

The successful implementation of the *Skills Investment Strategy* and a highly skilled workforce in Alberta requires commitment, collaboration, and high-level coordination among all stakeholders. Stakeholders that have a key role in the successful training and employment of Albertans include:

- individual Albertans
- employer and industry associations
- training providers
- Alberta Learning

The concept of investment is reinforced through all aspects of the Strategy. An emphasis is placed on the relationship with AHRE's delivery partners, which include AHRE and training provider staff, to help clients move into the labour force and create a stronger economy for Alberta.

Individual Albertans

The *Skills Investment Strategy* is developed to address the needs of Albertans who are seeking assistance with skill development and will potentially receive the training provided by the *Skills Investment Strategy*. Albertans who:

- are in search of information about the labour market and career or
- educational training opportunities available to them;
- are low-income and receiving income support from the provincial government and lacking the basic work skills expected of the current workforce;
- are eligible for Employment Insurance (EI) through the Labour Market Development Agreement (LMDA); and
- are low-income and require additional skills to find employment or remain self-sufficient.

Clients are responsible for providing the necessary information for their eligibility assessments and investing the time and energy to make successful changes in their lives. In return, clients benefit from increased flexibility to access skill development programs and services on a full or part-time basis.

Employer and Industry Associations

Employers and industry associations have a pivotal role in influencing the type of training offered through AHRE and training providers. By working in partnership with AHRE and providers, employers can impact changes that help Albertans address skill shortages and help build the future of their organization by hiring individuals trained through AHRE funded programs.

Training Providers

Albertans who come to AHRE vary considerably in their level of employability and training requirements. Training providers deliver training geared towards increasing client skills and employability. Through the Strategy, training providers may provide more occupationally focused and part-time training opportunities to our clients.

AHRE uses a number of delivery approaches with training providers to ensure Albertans' training requirements are met. These include contracting out program delivery, supporting workplace training, and providing funds for tuition, books, and living allowances. The delivery system consists of:

- public post-secondary institutions
- private colleges
- contracted agencies
- AHRE delivery staff

Alberta Learning

AHRE continues to work with Alberta Learning in sharing the responsibility for training Albertans. To improve the cost-effectiveness of programs and reduce duplication of work, AHRE will share information about program approvals and program/client outcomes with Alberta Learning while not necessarily collecting the same information. This is intended to ensure consistency across programs and providers.

Accountability

The *Skills Investment Strategy* requires a diverse delivery system of an extensive network of partners and providers. To ensure that there is a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders, an Accountability Framework has been developed. The Accountability Framework:

- articulates the legal framework for the relationship between delivery providers and AHRE;
- develops a mutual understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the various delivery partners and training providers; and
- defines expected outcomes and measures results.

Delivery partners, which include AHRE and training provider staff, are full participants in the Accountability Framework.

Looking Ahead

It is expected that a full implementation of the *Skills Investment Strategy* will take approximately two years.

Albertans in existing programs that are supported by AHRE will be able to complete their training if they continue to meet the eligibility criteria. Existing fee-for-service delivery contracts will be completed and new ones developed; they will reflect the new Skills Investment Programs. Training providers will continue to provide training for clients and respond to labour market demand for skilled workers.

Cost management, performance measures and evaluation strategies are being developed to ensure resources allocated to the Strategy are managed as effectively and efficiently as possible.

The Income and Employment Supports Act (Bill 32) provides the legislative authority to move three income support programs; Supports for Independence, Widows Pension, and the Skills Development Grant living allowances, together into a single integrated income and employment support program. Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) will continue as a separate program. The goal of the single integrated income and employment support program is to build on our past successes and help clients become and remain independent by providing a more flexible, client-centered approach.

Income support for all clients is determined through an assessment of financial need. The criteria applied to EI clients are different from those applied to low-income Albertans. AHRE will continue to provide grants to eligible clients, which will be used for Basic Skills and Academic Upgrading, as well as, Integrated, Occupational and Self-Employment training. The priority for AHRE skills investment grants will be given to clients already accessing provincial income support, clients with EI eligibility, low-income and unemployed Albertans.

Notes

Appendices

Glossary of Terms

Academic upgrading – Specific classroom skills such as Math, English and Science (generally grade 4-12) that may be required for ongoing training or for employment.

AHRE Print and Electronic Resources – are developed by the People Skills and Workplace Resources branch of AHRE. These resources are available in person through Labour Market Information Centres, by phone through the Career Information Hotline or via the internet at www.alis.gov.ab.ca .

Assessment - Assessment is a collaborative process that develops a profile of the client in order to assist the client and the assessor to make informed decisions about the most suitable supports, interventions and plans. Assessment is the first step in providing individuals with appropriate programs and services.

Career and Employment Assistance Services (CEAS) - are provided to serve the career and employment planning needs of any individual. CEAS include access to information products, career and educational planning, counselling services, and technological services such as computer, fax and telephones to assist with work search. Information about these services is available through the Career Information Hotline at 1-800-661-3753.

Case Management – Includes client support and follow-up from the conclusion of the assessment period through to completion of the action plan and tracking the results of the interventions provided to the client.

Client - Clients are individuals who access the department's programs and services. This means that anyone making contact with AHRE becomes a client when they are provided with service, regardless of the type of service.

Client Investment Plan – 'Client Investment Plan' will be the term used for the collaborative agreement between the client and the assessor that is the result of an assessment. The Client Investment Plan consists of the client's employment goal and the implementation steps planned, including appropriate AHRE programs and services.

Contracted funding – Funding paid to training providers through an agreement. Costs are paid directly to training providers as per terms of the contract.

Employability – Level of skill, education or job preparedness of the individual.

Employability Skills – Skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviors necessary to get and keep work.

Essential Skills – Essential skills are enabling skills that help people perform the tasks required by their occupation and other activities of daily life. They provide a foundation to learn other skills, and enhance individuals' ability to adapt to workplace change. Essential skills include reading text, writing, numeracy, oral communication, computer skills, and thinking skills, among others.

Integrated Training – Competency-based training programs for multi-barriered clients that integrate academic and general employability skills with job-specific skills. The programs are for one year and must teach the skills that are in demand by local/regional employers. The programs must also provide evidence that the graduates will find work in occupations related to their training without having to undertake further training.

Job Order Bank Service (JOBS) – A free job bank service for Alberta employers and job seekers.

Appendix I

Job Placement Services – These match eligible Albertans seeking work directly with prospective employers able to provide them with viable employment.

Labour Force Planning – This includes all planning that works to understand and address labour market issues. Labour force planning includes understanding current and projected labour supply and demand imbalances and identifying policies/programs/services to address these imbalances.

Labour Market Development Agreement (LMDA) – The federal-provincial agreement which makes Alberta's delivery of Employment Insurance retraining benefits, work search, and career planning services for Employment Insurance recipients possible. The goal of the LMDA is to provide EI recipients with training and support so they can enhance their skills and return to work faster.

Labour Market Information Centres - career centers located at Alberta Service Centres that provide clients with access to career and employment assistance services. Information is available through the Career Information Hotline at 1-800-661-3753 or via the Internet at www.alis.gov.ab.ca/career/cs/abcareer.asp .

Low-income Albertan – Currently there is no common definition of a low-income Albertan, however, the Alberta government uses the Market Basket Measure as a core measure in its Business Plan for two of its goals related to low-income.

Market Basket Measure (MBM) – The MBM is a measure of the combined family income required to purchase a basket of goods and services that allows a family to achieve a modest standard of living above subsistence levels.

Occupational Skills – Occupational Skills are job-specific technical skills that are required to perform specific tasks for a particular job.

Occupational Training – Classroom-based training of one year or less that is occupation-specific and focused on helping clients acquire the job specific skills needed to significantly improve their employment status. All occupational training programs must teach skills that are in demand by local/regional employers and provide evidence that the graduates of the programs will find work in occupations related to their training without having to undertake further training.

Part-time Training – Part-time is described as less than full-time and as stated in individual training program guidelines.

Tuition-based funding – Funding available to eligible learners entering AHRE designated programs. Learners must complete a funding application form and receive approval before tuition and mandatory fees are paid to a provider.

Workplace Training – Worksite training or exposure that focuses on helping clients acquire the employment skills needed to find and maintain employment and increase their income from employment. This type of Job Skills Training has two parts: Work Exposure (designed to help clients develop an awareness of specific occupation and employment opportunities over a period of a few weeks) and Workplace Training (tailor-made and structured worksite-based training opportunities of 6 months or less that teach clients specific skills for occupations that are in demand).

Youth – Albertans aged 16 to 24.

Resource List

Resources used in SIS policy and program development:

- Alberta Human Resources and Employment (AHRE) commitments and expenditures – Skills Development Program (SDP) clients- Report RDLM-2001/2002, 2002/2003 Alberta Learning.
- Alberta Occupational Employment Outlook, Alberta Modified Canadian Occupational Projection System (COPS) Outlook AHRE (2002-2007)
- Alberta Youth Employment Strategy
- *Breaking Barriers* – Enhancing Employment Opportunities for Persons With Disabilities (*Final report of the Minister's Employability Council April 2002)*
- Career Assistance Information System (CAIS) Training Program Results-2000-2003
- Defining the Path: Alberta Human Resources and Employment Aboriginal Strategy
- Findings from the Pilot Survey: The Evolving Workplace Statistics Canada 1999
- Income and Employment Program (IEP) Average Cost per Case by Need and Income Codes 2001/2002 People Investments
- Management Information Report Provincial Summary 2002 and 2003
- Market Basket Measure- Data, Low-Income Cut-Offs (LICO) Data -2002-2003 Human Resources Development Canada
- Minister's Employability Council Report
- Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) Committee to Review Low-Income Programs (November 2001)
    - What We Heard
    - What We Recommend
- People and Prosperity – the Government of Alberta's human resources strategy for Albertans
- Prepared For Growth: Building Alberta's Labour Supply, Labour Force Planning Committee, October 2001

    This report examines current labour market conditions, provides an outlook to 2005 and presents the Government of Alberta's strategy to support the development of human resources essential to Alberta's future growth and prosperity.

Appendix II

Resource List

- Prepared For Growth: Building Alberta's Labour Supply, Year One Report to Albertans (brochure)
- Review of Part-time Initiatives AHRE and Alberta Family and Social Services (AFSS) (1999).
- Selected Labour Force Statistics: Source Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey (2001 Historical)
- Skills Investment Strategy
    - Supporting the Development of a Skilled Workforce in Alberta (Discussion Paper) June 2002
    - Consultation Highlights (November 2002)
- Towards Evidence-Based Policy for Canadian Education, John Deutsch Institute for the Study of Economic Policy, Queen's University, 2002.

Accountability Framework Roles and Responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities of clients, employers, training providers and AHRE staff under the proposed Accountability Framework include:

Client

- Provide required information to determine eligibility for assessment and service.
- Develop a client investment plan that outlines their training requirements and employment goals.
- Complete part-time or full-time programs as stated in the client investment plan.
- Comply with criteria established by the *Employment Insurance Act* and, where appropriate, have a referral from Human Resources Development Canada to participate in AHRE part-time programs.
- Comply with provincial income support criteria.

Employer

- Identify needs for workers (labour market need).
- Provide part-time and full-time worksite training opportunities for clients.
- Provide work experience opportunities for clients.
- Consider employing graduates of training.
- Participate in competency/curriculum development process, wherever possible.

Training provider

- Deliver training as approved by either Alberta Learning or AHRE, and as designated for grant purposes by AHRE.
- Carry out the terms and conditions of the Program Approval Agreement or the Fee for Service contract.
- Meet requirements established in AHRE Accountability Framework.
- Monitor and report client progress, as required.
- Capture client data as specified in contractual agreements.
- Comply with appropriate AHRE legislation, regulations, policies and agreements.

AHRE

Skills Investment Division

- Develop program approval process and approve programs.
- Develop policy and guidelines for programs.
- Develop provincial objectives.
- Monitor provider compliance with appropriate AHRE legislation, regulations, policies and agreements.
- Monitor the implementation of the SIS and ensure the overall policy objectives of the strategy are being addressed.
- Monitor the Accountability Framework Agreements on an aggregate level provincially.

Regional Program Management

- Manage regional budget allocation for part-time and full-time initiatives within total budget.
- Monitor regional part-time and full-time expenditures.
- Manage the contracting process.
- Monitor contract activities and report on the results achieved.
- Act as a resource for training providers.
- Participate in labour force planning activities.
- Provide labour market information to clients, providers, stakeholders and the public.
- Monitor the Accountability Framework Agreements at the regional level.

Shared Roles

AHRE staff, training providers and related agencies will also be required to work together to:

- Complete the appropriate client assessment.
- Work with the client to develop a client investment plan.
- Provide an appropriate referral.
- Document information as required to ensure tracking and monitoring of clients at the appropriate level.
- Ensure that clients are aware of their obligations under the Income and Employment Supports Act (when appropriate) and the Employment Income (EI) Act for AHRE and Human Resources Development Canada.
- Provide case management services as required.